

Is Christianity Impracticable?

BY

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WE are told it is. The great number of Church members, including their leaders, some of the most prominent, tell us that it was not only impracticable but impossible for us as a nation to do other than we have. War, they say, is most wicked; but this war is righteous because we are engaged in it, and we are right because we could not help ourselves. We were compelled. War is futile and ferocious, they admit—"the most futile and ferocious of human follies," as Secretary John Hay called it; but this war was unavoidable, made *necessary* for us by the wickedness of others. Tell them that wrong is never necessary for moral beings, that the wrong doing of others cannot force itself upon us as right, and that the will of others can never turn wrong into right for us: that each one is responsible for his own moral code, and they will fly off at a tangent and become obstinately contradictory. (War is not Christian, they admit, but "this war" is an exception. We could not help ourselves, and then, as the newest neophyte intimates, war is a sacred sacramental divine thing, for it involves the principle of self-giving, which is the essence of all true religion. Then, if they are pressed still further, they fall back upon the "blessed word" *righteousness*; and if you ask them what they mean by that, they look at you with horror and exclaim, "Righteousness! Why obedience to the 'Eternal Law of Righteousness,'" which, as the late R. W. Dale

taught, though eternal is not God or the will of God, but something to which God Himself is subject. So you are left in the presence of that eternal entity which is not God, but something to which He is subject, and with the implication that the Christian ideal is sometimes impossible and the Christian ethic impracticable. We do not wonder that those who accept that position, whether they profess and call themselves Christian or not, should begin to talk of "a second best" and a necessary "diluted Christianity," and that even "Brotherhood," subject to its paralysis, should become an approver and then an active recruiter for the organised fratricide called war, and that in the minds of many the doubt arises whether after all the Christian ideal may not be an impracticable faith for all times and circumstances. (It is really painful to listen to what "Christian" men and women are saying all around us. How then does the matter really stand ?)

J. Baldwin Brown, a Christian teacher of the last generation, too soon forgotten among us, discussing the injunction, "Bear ye one another's burdens," says :—

"The one hope of human society lies in the working of this 'law of Christ' through all its spheres. We may call the hope Utopian if we will ; though what right have we to speak of any great hope for man as Utopian, since the Kingdom of Heaven was visibly set up in our world ? The welfare of the great human commonwealth, the fulfilment of the hope which has lit the sad march of the human generations from the beginning, hangs on the response which man is prepared to offer to the exhortation, 'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus' [which is the true brotherhood]. If the world will have the mind of Christ to govern it, man's life on earth may be noble and blessed, as life is noble and blessed on high. If the world will not have the mind of Christ to govern it, it must go reeling on in its blindness and wretchedness, until a new deluge sweeps down to purify it, or a flashing bolt strikes it into the abyss."

This was written some thirty years before this terrible deluge of war which is sweeping over all lands, the full extent of the destruction and desolation of which is not yet visible. But, he continued,

"The exhortation which St. Paul addressed to the little company 'called saints'—that is, to the men and women who had

come out from the beliefs, habits, and objects of the society around them, to live after a higher pattern—is God's exhortation to the great world at large. If society is to be saved, it must be transformed into a Church; not altogether the kind of thing which we know by the name, but a society ruled by the Mind, and inspired by the Spirit of the Lord Jesus. Church and world are one in the far vision of the heavenly watches; they see beyond the weltering confusion from which earth's most earnest watchers are prone to turn with sad and sickened hearts, an earthly Kingdom of Heaven. 'Thy people also shall be all righteous,' was said of some far-off future of our world."

(That dream of "an earthly Kingdom of Heaven," is a delusion and a mockery, is it not? It would almost seem so, when its missionaries and evangelists accept this awful caricature and disappointing substitute of world-wide war with enthusiasm, and, for the moment at any rate, accommodate themselves to its demands and submit to its dominance. And yet is not that same "earthly Kingdom of Heaven" the universal hope of Christendom? From an innumerable company of souls, from an immense number of congregations and communities, the incessant divinely taught prayer ascends, "Our Father which art in Heaven, . . . thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." Is it a universal lie then—a mere conventional form of worship without meaning? Did the great Father teach men, His offspring, to ask for what could not be, and that, therefore, He never meant to give? Are not all these multitudes sincere? And if not all, then what of those who are, to whom it is the very soul of hope and the very breath of longing? Will you tell them it is impracticable? They know better. But, says Mr. Brown again concerning it—

"We pray for the coming of the Kingdom. Worldly men say 'Thy Kingdom come' with a vague feeling that the words mean some great blessing to mankind. The prayer means just this, Let the same mind be in the world which was also in Christ Jesus. There is no Kingdom of God anywhere which is other than the reign of the Mind of Christ. All progress is illusion, a mirage, a shimmer of glittering sand which does not enshrine more purely the Mind of Christ—self-denial, self-sacrifice, and Divine charity—in the inmost heart of mankind."

This is the hope of the future, the charter of the Divine Kingdom, the prayer and pledge and certainty of

the ending of war and the coming of permanent and universal Peace.

“When ye pray, say . . . Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done.” But the Kingdom is already here in germ, and actuality, and potentiality. What is needed now is the recognised presence of the King. And that has yet to come. To express it in the precision of our western speech, what is needed is the recognition, the perception of His presence, for He, too, is already here, or the Kingdom could not be in any sense. He is here, as He said, with us, all the days, even to the end, the consummation, of the Age. He is here, but He is coming : the paradox must surely mean, coming, in the recognition of His presence and authority. For were He to come again only as an actual visible man arrayed in flesh, who would know Him? Men knew Him not when once He came. “He came to His own, and His own received Him not.” Would they know Him any better, would they welcome Him any more, now? I trow not. What is needed is the perception of His personal presence and such recognition as will result in the doing of His will. It will be the next stage in the evolution of mankind; and for that we pray, and watch, and wait.

Even so, come Lord Jesus, come quickly.

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